

(N° 251)

PASTORAL LETTER

OF HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF CYRENE, ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF
QUEBEC, ON THE DUTIES OF ELECTORS DURING THE ELECTIONS.

LOUIS-NAZAIRE BÉGIN, BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND OF THE
APOSTOLIC SEE, ARCHBISHOP OF CYRENE, ADMINISTRATOR OF THE
ARCHDIOCESE OF QUEBEC,

*To the Clergy, both Secular and Regular, and to all the Faithful of
the said Archdiocese of Quebec, Greeting and Benediction in Our
Lord.*

Dearly Beloved Brethren,

The law of your country, which is just and wise, and which you must obey as to God Himself, gives you the right and imposes on you the duty of choosing the men on whom devolves both the enactment of all the laws necessary for the proper government of civil society and the administration of public affairs. It is for that reason that you are called to take part in political and municipal elections, at times appointed by the civil authorities in conformity with the law. Our intention, by these presents, is to explain to you briefly and clearly how you should behave in such circumstances, in order that your conscience may have nothing to reproach you before God. What we are going to say applies chiefly to political elections for the Parliament and the Legislature, but likewise, in due proportion, to the

municipal and other elections in which you have occasionally to take part.

I

Above all, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, we must warn you against two eminently pernicious errors which are seeking to gain credit amongst you, and which would soon lead you to the abandonment of Catholic faith and morals.

The first of these two errors teaches that you must be Christians and Catholics in your private life, but that you are not bound to be such in your public life, whenever you have occasion to act in a political or civil capacity.

The second error, which is nothing but a consequence of the former, pretends that faults and crimes forbidden by the law of God, cease to be faults and crimes, when you are exercising your civil or political rights.

The first of the two above errors would soon lead us to the condition of those countries where no heed is taken, in the public laws and institutions, of Christian Faith nor of the moral law revealed by God. The second would be the justification of perjury, of deceit, of every injustice and violence, which are not less opposed to the order and welfare of society than to the laws of morality. Those who preach to you such errors by word or example, either in their speeches or through the press, are not always alive to the consequences of their erroneous doctrine. They are usually men blinded by interest or passion, heedless of all provided they reach their ends, which are seldom disinterested. Of such might we say, as Our Lord, of the Pharisees: "They are blind, and leaders of the blind" (Matth. XV. 14.) They are truly blind, and no less blind are they that follow them, for they are all tending to perdition.

Would you be excusable, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, to allow yourselves to be deceived by such monstrous errors? Have we not been appointed by the Holy Ghost your Pastors and Teachers, to teach you in the name of God and of His Church whatsoever you must do as whatsoever you must believe? How could you one day escape God's justice by invoking the teachings

of masters whom He hath not appointed to teach you nor to enlighten your conscience ?

Assuredly, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, we do not pretend that the duties of your public life, as citizens, are in no wise different from certain other duties you have to perform in your private life. But the very acts of your private life are far from being all alike and the same. Working, sleeping, eating and praying, are occupations very different from one another. Yet, according to the Apostle, they all concern the glory of God and your own sanctification, and must spring from the same supernatural principle which renders them holy and deserving of life eternal. In like manner, the duties of your public life are quite different from those of your private life : but they are none the less imposed by the same will of God, and must be none the less performed with a view to life eternal. Not only Faith, but common sense itself tells you that, if you must perform in a Christian spirit the least of your actions, and even those that seem the least connected with religion, you must likewise, in a Christian spirit, fulfil the more important obligations of you public and civil life.

In truth, in each one of us, there are not two distinct persons, the one a Christian, and the other, not a Christian, the one, a Catholic, and the other that may or may not be a Catholic. There is, in each one of us, but one and a single man, who is bound to be a Christian and a Catholic in all his thoughts, in all his words and all his actions. Wherefore, if, wherever you are, you are Catholics, in whatsoever you do, you must act as Catholics.

Would it not be supremely unreasonable to say, for example, that a tradesman must act as a Christian and a Catholic while he is in church and is performing acts of religion, but that he is no more a Christian and a Catholic in his business transactions or behind his counter, and that, as a tradesman, he is amenable only to his own will, and is independent of every principle of Catholic faith and morals ?

And what would you think of a father who would not watch over his household, leaving it a prey to scandal and disorder ? That such a one is an unworthy Christian, an unworthy Catholic.

You would judge him as does the Apostle : « If any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. » (I Tim. V, 8.) And if such a man pretended as an excuse, that it is not as a Christian and a Catholic that he is acting thus, but merely as the father of a family, you would rightly answer him that there are not in him two men, the one a Catholic, and the other, a father, but one only man, who is bound to be simply a Christian and Catholic father of his family.

What you would say of tradesmen and fathers, as in the above examples, we say it likewise unto you of citizens and public men, whatsoever their rank or standing.

You should therefore, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, believe that all the acts of your civil and political life must, like those of your private life, be inspired and directed by a Catholic conscience. And that Catholic conscience that should be yours, you know that it is shaped by the teachings and by the authority of the Church, of whom Catholics must learn both the truths that they should believe and the duties they should practise. Her teaching is the supreme rule of morals as it is the rule of our Faith.

If you have understood that you must remain Christians and Catholics in your public as well as in your private life, you likewise understand that your conscience, as well in one as in the other, remains subject to the authority of the Church and to the law of God.

Assuredly, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, no one will dare publicly to teach that the law of God no more obliges during the elections either candidates or voters, and that politicians may easily dispense therewith. It would be better for you, were such an error taught you rather by word and less by deed. It is easier for us to censure the doctrine than the conduct of those who scandalize you and ruin public morals. The great evil, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, is that many of those who should set you an example, behave as if, in politics, there were no moral law to observe.

Nobody condemns those politicians who publicly criticize and attack, in speeches or in the press, a government they wish to defeat or men whom they would like to see ousted from office,

provided that in that party-strife which is inevitable in a country endowed as ours with a parliamentary system of government, they render not themselves guilty of any fault against God, against neighbor or against society itself. In political as in other warfare, loyal and lawful arms are alone allowed; and the end in view must be the public weal.

Not more in election-time than in any other, is any one free to avoid the law of God and His holy will. Not more in matters politic or civil than in any other, the constitution ordering you to freely give your vote to the men of your choice allows you any unjust or dishonest means to assure their triumph or that of your own opinions. Even were such the will of the constitution, it would not be possible. The law of the land might add to the obligations which God has laid upon us either by the natural law or by His commandments, or by the precepts of the Church, but it is powerless in any case to free you therefrom. The civil law will not, therefore, at the judgment-seat of God, absolve you of the transgressions of the divine law of which you may be guilty. On the contrary, it will accuse you and render your condemnation more dreadful; for the faults committed in your public life always involve more or less scandal, and injure not only a few private individuals, but the entire commonwealth.

II

Should we, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, warn you against the faults into which you may be more easily led during election-time?

One of the most grievous, assuredly, is *perjury*. You become guilty of that enormous crime against God and society, not only when, under oath, you tell a falsehood or disguise the truth but each time that you are wilfully the cause of a false oath.

Beware, therefore, lest, by violating the just laws made to ensure honest elections, you expose yourselves or others to perjury. Respect the holiness of the oath by asking or commanding it only when absolutely necessary to save important interests or for the efficacious protection of justice; for if it is a shameful and

abominable crime to commit or to cause a perjury, it is no less a sin against God and society to discredit solemn swearing and to lower it in the eyes of the people, by indiscreetly demanding it for reasons that are neither grave nor important, for the sole purpose of annoying an opponent, or of breeding against him unjustifiable suspicions.

Remember likewise that, if justice does not forbid you to estimate and to condemn the public acts of political men, it never, however, permits you to do so unjustly. If it be necessary, for the public good, to discuss, in your hearing, the advantages and inconveniences of certain legal or administrative measures, so that you may with due knowledge judge what men deserve your confidence and your vote, it is never lawful to resort to slander, much less to calumny, against candidates or politicians.

Now, the sin of slander, and often of grievous slander, is incurred, whenever are divulged the private faults or defects of a public man, when such faults in nowise concern his civil and political duties or functions. Such sins of slander, when in grievous matters, are certainly mortal for whomsoever puts them in circulation or repeats them to others.

More grievous still and less pardonable are the calumnies which through passion and party-spirit are invented against the private or the public life of candidates and other political characters. Now, there is calumny each time that one attributes to his neighbor a fault which he has not committed or which cannot be proved : for every man has a right to his reputation as long as it cannot be proved that he is guilty.

Judge thereby how guilty before God, and how despised by all Christians and all just and honest citizens, are and should be those writers and speakers who invent for the benefit of their cause facts that have never existed, who without foundation attribute to their adversaries intentions they never harbored; purposely travesty and misrepresent public actions, showing crimes and scandals where there may be nothing else than a mere want of skill and forethought, or even perfect honesty and prudence.

Such calumnies easily become acts of the most grievous injustice, and, like all such, demand reparation. Not only must they be accused at the tribunal of penance, but the accusation of such faults and the sorrow it begets will never obtain pardon thereof, if there be no reparation made, in so much as possible, for the harm they have brought to the reputation and rightful interests of the neighbor.

Respect justice, not only by carefully avoiding all that may unjustly touch your neighbor's reputation, but by complying with the just and wise laws enacted to ensure the honesty of elections. To infringe such laws is to sin at the same time against one's neighbor and against society.

All your fellow-citizens qualified by law have a right to canvass for your votes for public offices, and it would be iniquitous to deprive them of a right which is guaranteed them by the constitution, or to prevent the exercise thereof by means that conscience rightly forbids and condemns as contrary to natural equity and the public good.

It is, therefore, an iniquity to win an election or even a single vote by a falsehood, by a fraud, by intemperance, by unjust and illicit promises, by every influence that, instead of enlightening the electors, impassions them, purposely blinding them, to prevent them from judging with justice, and from freely following the dictates of a rightly formed and well enlightened conscience.

The laws do not and cannot forbid you to influence the votes of your fellow-citizens. On the contrary, it is your right and sometimes your duty to exert the influence you may possess over them to aid and direct them in the fulfilment of their duties as citizens. It is a duty of charity towards your brethren, it is a duty of true patriotism towards your country. The law only forbids you to influence them by such unjust and immoral means as are condemned by natural justice and by Christian morality.

Work for the welfare of your country, not by rousing the passions and prejudices of your fellow-citizens, but by forming

their judgment according to justice and doing what is in your power to enlighten their conscience.

III

We have still to treat of a subject more difficult and delicate than the foregoing. We shall address you with the same frankness and the same clearness, because we have naught else in view than God's interests and those of your souls, being assured that, on your part, you will listen to our counsels as coming from God Himself : « God as it were exhorting by us. » (II Cor. V, 20.)

It is not enough to avoid perjury, slander, calumny, injustice of all kinds, in a word, all that the law of God and natural honesty condemn. It is not enough to abstain from evil; you must also do good. Now, to do good, you must act not only with pure and upright intentions, but also with prudence, wisdom and discernment. What therefore are the rules you should follow in order to act in a wise and Christian manner in the exercise of your rights as citizens particularly during election-time ?

These rules, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, may be summed up in the following words of the Pastor of your souls which, for the past twenty years, have been repeatedly read to you on the eve of all elections. We repeat them to you to-day.

« While the constitution gives you the right and liberty to choose him who is to represent you in Parliament, God imposes upon you the obligation of using this liberty and this right solely for the greater good of the country, for to its greater good all politics, and consequently all elections, should tend.

« You should therefore give your vote only to men whom you judge capable of procuring this good, and sincerely disposed to do so. » (Pastoral letter of His Grace Archbishop Tasche-reau, May 25, 1876).

That which you should have in view during elections, is the greater good of the country. Now, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, the greater good of a country is the reign of God by Chris-

tian faith and morals. The device as well of Christian nations, as of individuals, consists in these words of the Saviour : « Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his justice ; and all these things shall be added unto you ». (Matth. VI, 33.) Such is the fundamental precept of Christian wisdom and such is likewise the fundamental precept of political wisdom. It is justice that makes nations great and powerful ; it is impiety that ruins and destroys them. The first good of a nation is therefore Christian Faith, the groundwork and foundation of public and private morals ; and such is the good you must intend, desire and secure, as much as it lies in your power, to future generations, as your forefathers have secured it to yourselves.

This means to say, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, that you would be grievously guilty in giving your votes during the elections to men who are hostile or indifferent to Christian ideas and pretend to be concerned only with material interests, even when they may come in conflict with the religious and moral interests of your country. To estimate the religious spirit of a man, you possess a safe rule that cannot deceive you : compare his principles with those proclaimed by Holy Church through the teaching of her Pastors. For there is no sincere and true religious spirit outside of a perfect submission of mind, will and conduct to the authority of the rightful Pastors established by God to watch over the true interests of religion.

After Christian faith and morals, the chief good of a country is peace in order. Two things especially favor and secure peace and order in civil society : the stability of its institutions and laws, and respect for justice. No doubt, human laws and institutions are essentially variable, because they are imperfect, and may be modified by time and circumstances. But, on the other hand, nothing is more contrary to good order and the peace of society than the instability of the institutions and laws that govern it. This means, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, that under ordinary circumstances, if you are desirous of the good of your country, you must give your votes to wise and prudent men who govern according to tradition and acquired experience, rather than to rash and adventurous spirits always ready to believe and to say that, in order to improve the condition of

society, everything must be subverted and changed. It matters therefore greatly for public order and peace that you give your votes to men who are animated with love and respect for, and have the experience of, the institutions of the country, and who will endeavor to render them more perfect rather than to alter and destroy them.

It is not less important that you choose to govern your country men whose disinterestedness and devotedness are well known to you, as well as their unalterable love and profound respect for justice. For order exists in society, and with order the peace and union of all citizens, only through the respect and protection of the rights of all. He is not worthy to take part in the government of his country, who is not able to place public before private interest, or who would willingly sacrifice the rights of his fellow-citizens under the false pretext of public wisdom. The only public wisdom capable of procuring a nation's good, is that which protects all rights, in so much as they may be protected, and represses every injustice, in so much as it may be repressed.

Finally, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, the last, and still very important good of a country, is its temporal prosperity. It is the proper end of civil society. Three qualities are necessary in your representatives in order to labor efficaciously for the temporal good of your country : they are honesty, intelligence and experience of public affairs.

The most important and necessary of these three qualities is honesty, provided that it be associated with a firm and sound judgment. For, without honesty, intelligence and experience only serve to betray you more successfully, and to better conceal the surrender of your true interests. However, in many circumstances, honesty alone is not sufficient to protect and efficaciously serve your true interests, although it may save them from being betrayed. Wherefore, you would act wisely in choosing among the most upright and honest those who possess the greatest sum of intelligence and experience.

But to what practical means will you resort in order not to err in your choice? You shall seek to know the men who canvass for your vote. « You would be most imprudent », indeed, « were

« you to give your vote to the first comer who presents himself
« with fine words and grand promises, without taking pains to
« ascertain his ability, and especially his principles. Examine
« carefully how far you can rely on each candidate for the pro-
« tection of your religious as well as of your temporal interests. »
(Pastoral letter of His Grace Archbishop Taschereau, May
25, 1876).

Examine therefore by yourselves to know the character, the
conduct, the principles of a candidate. Listen to his speeches
and weigh his reasons, and submit them whenever requisite to
the appreciation of educated men who are fit to approve of them
or to answer them. Examine what men recommend the can-
didate to your confidence, who are his friends, who his adver-
saries. And, whenever he belongs to a definite political party, try
to understand the principles and the programme of such a party,
and in what they seem to you advantageous for, or contrary to,
the moral and temporal good of the country.

Listen attentively, and without having made up your mind
beforehand, to the discussion of political questions on which
you may have to form your judgment. Do not place a blind
trust in a party-newspaper which often disfigures facts, and
seeks only to delude you regarding the leaders it serves and to
prejudice you against those it combats. It is often by comparing
contradictory judgments and assertions that you may discover
the truth.

Finally, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren, in order to act pru-
dently, you should, in such circumstances, take advice of wiser
than yourselves. If there be in your parish a man wise, learned,
conscientious, whom you would like to consult on any affair
that might concern the honor or the future of your family, if
above all, such a man be religious, and fearing God, and seem
to you not to be inspired by passion nor engaged in political
party-intrigues, it is from him that you may expect the explana-
tion or information requisite to form your judgment.

Nothing prevents you, if you cannot otherwise seriously form
your conscience, from exposing your doubts to, and asking
advice of, him who, having one day to answer for your soul
before the judgment-seat of God, is bound more than any one

else to aid you in properly fulfilling all your duties as Christians and citizens.

You shall meditate before God, Our Dearly Beloved Brethren these grave instructions. You shall beg of Him the grace to fully understand them and carefully put them into practice, being convinced that they will teach you how to be good citizens without ceasing to be true Christians.

The present pastoral letter shall be read and published at the prone in all churches and parochial chapels or others where public service is held, the Sunday following its reception.

Given at Quebec under our signature, the seal of the Archdiocese and the counter-signature of our Secretary, the first of March, one thousand eight hundred and ninety seven.



† L. N. Archb. of CYRENE,
Administrator.

By order of His Grace.

B. Ph. Garneau, Pst,
Secretary.

N. B.—The above Pastoral Letter will be substituted to the letter of May 25th 1876, which will cease to be read until further notice.